TL 1445-4

Expression of support for the Apostolic Administrator of Dili

by the clergy of East Timor

As priests who constitute the clergy (presbyterium) of the diocese of Dili, we have recently experienced the joy and the sadness, the moments of difficulty and anguish of our Bishop and of our people. From the outset we have followed attentively and objectively all that concerns our Bishop. We have shared his feelings, wishes and fears, and now his sufferings. The time has come to break the silence. We are not requesting the right to speak, we are requesting the right to be heard.

The Timorese Church and Christians in Timor have the right to be heard. Who are the Catholics of Timor? Who is the true representative, who are the true representatives of the Timorese Catholic Church? Who has the right to speak in the name of the Timorese people?

The Church has the right to apply its doctrine, to have its say on a variety of human situations in which the dignity of individuals and of the people is at stake. It is in this context that the 6 February letter of the Apostolic Administrator was written. In this letter he declared that in the present situation in Timor, the only solution for the armed conflict and for the people of Timor is for the people to exercise their right, a right that has not been exercised up to now.

Since the letter of 6 February was made public by social communication, various Indonesian government personalities and governmental organisations have sought to minimise the meaning and significance of the letter, saying that it was purely a personal letter and solely the responsibility of the Apostolic Administrator of Dili himself.

In his letter, the Apostolic Administrator spoke on his own behalf and as head of the Timorese Church. By speaking as head of the local church, in complete accord with church doctrine and with recent pontifical teachings, how can anyone deny the weight and force of that which comes from his apostolic ministry in the territory, in close union with the people during all the years when the Church has been constantly at the side of the people, above all at difficult, critical and dramatic times in the lives of the oppressed people when they themselves have no voice to express their true feelings?

No honest observer can deny that the institution uniquely placed in East Timor is the Church. In face of recent developments (which the military are trying to conceal), the Church has once again raised its voice on behalf of the people and in their defence. The (Bishop's) letter was entusiastically welcomed by the population who could once again see confirmed their confidence in the fidelity of the Church to its people, who feel

that their stand is represented by the position taken by the head of the Church.

The clergy of Dili reject those pernicious opinions and suggestions which go against the spirit and the doctrine of the Church, as manifested by certain ecclesiastical personalities and by those who have been manipulated.

The Bishop is the representative of the Church, theologically, juridically and ecclesiastically, and when he speaks in that capacity, in accordance with the Church and in line with the feelings of the clergy and of the people, he acts with an authority that must be respected and taken into account.

We hope that our appeal and explanation will help the powers that be and ecclesiatical personalities to understand the feelings of the Church and the people of Timor which were expressed in the 6 February 1989 letter of the Apostolic Administrator of Dili.

From the clergy of the diocese of Dili.

We have not signed our names, in order to be able to continue to work at the side of our people.

July 1989

(The text was not signed, but it was obtained through Catholic Church channels whose authenticity is beyond question.)